

NOTE

Commentary:**Why So Few Female
Senior Academics?**

by

Phyllis Tharenou †**1. Introduction**

James Everett's paper raises interesting questions about why there are so few female academics in Australia at levels other than junior ones, and why there has been so little improvement in the last decade. He shows that gender differences in rank are not caused by differences in age, higher degree, publications, and time at one's university. Rather, by basing his estimates on the impact of these "qualifications" on the rank of male academics, he shows that women gain much lower rank than their qualifications would provide if they were men. The effects are pronounced at senior lecturer level but become worse at higher levels. Indeed, they occur consistently, even in Arts where a greater proportion of female academics occur than is typical. In the majority of cases, they do not appear to be improving over the twelve year span of the study, especially in the "old" universities.

Although variations in samples, controls, and modelling techniques can reduce the gender discrepancy found in tests of statistical discrimination (e.g., as in Green 1993; Long, Allison and McGinnis 1993), James Everett's finding agrees with the empirical evidence. In psychology in the U.S., women with qualifications, graduate programmes, publication and research records, and references comparable to men obtain academic jobs at lower levels and less prestigious institutions (Bronstein, Blank, Pfenning and White 1986), and women are at lower academic rank even when career and publication histories and types of institution are controlled (Hurlbert and Rosenfeld 1992). Similarly, male managers gain higher levels, salary, and promotions than females comparable in age, expertise, career paths and mobility, and organisational size and industry (Cox and Harquail 1991; Stroh, Brett and Reilly 1992). Women are shown held to higher promotion standards than men (Olson and Becker 1983; Spurr 1990) including in academia (Long, Allison and McGinnis 1993). The evidence appears to contradict

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men's views that women are advantaged by equal employment opportunity/affirmative action legislation and that bias and not "merit" occurs in the selection and promotion of women (Heilman 1994) including in academia in Australia (Everett and Entekin 1994). What is occurring is a backlash against EEO, with unintended negative effects on the "beneficiaries" (Heilman 1994; Kravitz and Platania 1993).

2. The Important Question is Why?

So we know that comparable women advance less than comparable men. James Everett shows this occurs in academia, as elsewhere. Where do we go from here? What we now need to know is *why* James Everett's findings occur. Understanding the reasons is important. The under-representation of female academics means women are not academic rôle models for students, and enhances perceptions that women are not consistent with academic jobs, especially at senior levels. The data in James Everett's paper indicate that the "think manager, think male" syndrome (Schein and Mueller 1992) translates equally well to the "think professor, think male" stereotype. We do not know if this is because of discrimination, where women are treated unequally compared to men with regard to selection, promotion, development and career paths, or if other factors are involved. This is the critical question.

There may be reasons that relate to women themselves and to the structures of opportunity and power that cause comparably qualified academic women not to hold as high ranks as men. Although it is not a popular suggestion, perhaps female academics apply less for promotion than males (Tharenou and Conroy 1988) although this seems less true now than formerly (Tharenou and Conroy 1994). Or perhaps female academics refuse job offers of advancement more than men. But gender differences do not occur in the reasons academics accept offers of positions (Teevan, Pepper and Pellizari 1992), although female rejecters do so primarily because of family needs and the length and type of contract, and less than men because of university reputation. As well, advancement in academia may require relocation, and Australian women are less willing to relocate for advancement than men, and do so less (Tharenou and Conroy 1988, 1994). This is important because relocation increases females' levels more than males (Brett, Stroh and Reilly 1992). Women relocate for family and personal reasons, but are restricted by family issues for their own relocation, whereas men relocate for advancement and economic reasons. It is also possible that women aspire to advance to high positions in academia less than men, although evidence provides conflicting support for gender differences in managers' aspirations (e.g., Harlan and Weiss 1982; Singer 1991), and we do not understand how aspirations for high ranks are formed. Academic women may have different and perhaps lower career goals than men, influencing advancement. But the evidence in general, and for academics in particular, does not indicate women have lower career motivation than men [see Teevan et al. (1992) for a review]. Indeed, female academics aspire to leadership positions as much as men, and to as high level positions (Bowker, Hinkler and

Worner 1983).

James Everett considers that women applicants may be given less chance of promotion than men, and there is evidence consistent with this claim. Academic women have a lower probability of being promoted than men after controlling for effects of other variables (Long et al. 1993). Time structures favour men; for example, where delay occurs (e.g., from gaining a PhD to first academic job), men are promoted faster, whereas women are promoted slower, presumably to make up for “older” junior men. Academic women start with more part-time and contract work, and less tenured and lower level appointments and salary than men, find it harder to gain tenure, and are promoted more slowly than comparable men (Bronstein et al. 1986; Kahn and Robbins’ 1985 review). The evidence is consistent with discrimination as an explanation, whether unintentional because women do not fit the academic stereotype or through a complex interplay of factors related to experience and performance. But in some cases, discrimination against women has not been found in hiring, promotion, tenure, and salary of academics [e.g., see Teevan et al. (1992) review].

James Everett points out that women are unlikely to be less competent teachers than men, and so this is presumably not a cause of lower rank. But quantity of teaching, rather than quality, may be the issue. Academic women spend more time teaching than in research and administration (Baldrige et al. 1978). Female academics in Australia report performing teaching tasks more frequently than males report (Schoen and Winocur 1988), and women do more service than men (Carnegie Foundation 1990) although at low decision-making levels (Bagihole 1993). Recent reports (Association of University Teachers, *The Australian*, October 1994, p.33) confirm higher workhours for female than male academics especially due to graduate supervision. On this basis, women’s high teaching, service and supervision may result in work loads inconsistent with a fast rate of advancement. Women themselves, and their bosses, may view women as more suited to teaching, supervision and low level service than to tasks linked to advancement, those of research and administration. Are women’s teaching, supervision and service loads caused by women’s inability to say no, their less secure positions, their being good organisational citizens, or heads/chairs not protecting women’s research output in the same way as they do men’s (and men themselves do)? These are unanswered questions.

The evidence for self-confidence supports arguments that females develop differently as academics than males. Males and females are similarly self-confident as teachers (Landino and Owen 1988; Schoen and Winocur 1988). But men report more self-confidence for research and administration than women (Landino and Owen 1988) and self-confidence decreased from teaching to research to administration for Australian academics; men, however, were not less confident about administration than research (Schoen and Winocur 1988). If you are highly self-confident about research and administration you may seek and persist at these tasks, gaining visibility, familiarity, credentials, and credibility for senior posts. We do not know if gender differences in teaching time, supervision and service

and in confidence for administration lead to less progression of women than men. The answer, however, is not in taking women and loading them up with “service”.

James Everett examined age and time in the current university as time-based measures influencing gender differences in rank. Tenure in the current university may not capture the different “career clocks” of women and men, whereas overall time in employment (although related to university tenure) is likely to relate differently to men’s and women’s rank. Moreover, age is less highly related to years of full-time employment for women than men, because women have more discontinuous worklives (Tharenou, Latimer and Conroy 1994). The consistency of men’s age, university tenure, and years of employment places them in cohorts, unlike women. Career “tournaments” (Rosenbaum 1984), which are based on cohorts, result in winners and losers at each round. Whereas men are likely to be in the tournament, and thus can win, women are less likely to be, and thus to be less part of career paths to academic advancement.

James Everett points out that women have more discontinuous worklives than men. In the context of this discontinuous employment, women’s qualifications may be less valued than men’s by those who make advancement decisions. Women’s competence has been found to be devalued in comparison to men’s, except under a few, specific conditions (Lott 1985). Consistent with this argument, although a gap in career strongly reduces the odds of promotion for academics, it does so more for women than men (Long et al. 1993). Controlling for publications and length of service, women’s career interruptions, but not men’s, decreased probability of gaining tenure and increased time to tenure (McElrath 1992). Women chiefly left academic jobs for spouse’s employment (McElrath 1992). In addition, it does not appear to be number of children, and thus presumably home responsibilities, that causes academic women to gain less and slower promotion than men (Long et al. 1993). Overall, the dynamic interplay between qualifications (in Everett’s paper women’s fewer publications, and lesser higher degrees and time at one’s university), continuity of work experience, nature of work performed by men and women, and stereotypes about senior academics, may influence how superiors and women themselves view their advancement.

3. Opportunity Structures

This leads to the notion that opportunity structures and power are different for female and male academics. In James Everett’s study, women have fewer publications, as previously found (Cohen and Gutek 1991), and less service in their university. We do not know why the gender differences occur, for example, in publications. It may be because women in James Everett’s study are younger than the men, or for other reasons. By examining age as a control, we can determine if women are less qualified because of age, as has been found by Bronstein, et al. (1986), or if the differences hold up despite age. Then age is not the cause, and other factors need to be examined, such as workloads, sponsoring, encouragement, self-confidence or aspirations. Importantly, although women are not less qualified than men on appointment (Bronstein et al. 1986), their qualifications appear to

decrease relative to men's from early in their careers; for example, from the first or second job. This gender difference will lead to different opportunity structures and access to power for women than men. Men's qualifications appear linked to career stages in a systematic ordered progression, resulting in particular networks, resources, visibility and reputation attached at each career stage, which accumulate. Women's qualifications appear less systematically linked to career stages, because women have fewer qualifications or more discontinuous paths than men. Women, therefore, are less likely to gain networks, resources, visibility and reputation at each career stage as do men, and their opportunities for advancement are reduced. As Kanter (1979) states, differential degrees of opportunity are created by the structure of tracks and career paths for men and women.

Kanter (1979) points out that, even when the structural opportunities of jobs are objectively the same for individuals, as occurs in academia, individuals can lose out in competition for scarce mobility. Because women have fewer publications and less experience and confidence in some tasks than men, they may begin losing out in competition. This may be especially important in promotion to associate professor from senior lecturer where competition is fierce. Kanter (1977) also points out the psychological effects when low opportunity is perceived. Aspirations for advancement are reduced. Women particularly may need high aspirations if they are to advance under these circumstances.

4. Momentum

Hence, dynamic processes linked to the differential distribution of rewards by universities may come into play. Cannings and Montmarquette (1991) use the concept "managerial momentum" to explain why women managers in their study did not advance as much as men even though they were higher performers and applied as much for promotion. Managerial momentum is a continuous process of upward mobility in the organisation, and explains why careers stall. Broadening Canning' and Montmarquette's (1991) term, we might consider whether males and females differ in momentum with respect to upward mobility. Male academics appear to fare better than female at gaining and sustaining momentum. If men have higher publication rates, tenure and other qualifications as well as familiarity, recognition and reputation early in their career paths, these interact to gain further opportunities and power through resources, and thus rank. Hence, advancement involves the interaction of performance, ambition and rewards (Cannings and Montmarquette 1991). James Everett's paper captures performance, and it is time to capture the dynamic interplay between all aspects.

What might be some of the ways in which momentum with respect to upward mobility develops? Men appear not to rely on formal meritocratic procedures as much as women do to gain momentum (Cannings and Montmarquette 1991). Instead, men build informal networks—contacts with superiors—and these result in their greater advancement. Evidence suggests that recruitment in academia relies on friends and colleagues' recommendations of viable job candidates, and that some positions are filled in this way (Kessler et al.

1976). Kanter (1977) has shown how informal networks provide individuals with power, and that power increases advancement. Women appear to rely more on formal meritocratic procedures than informal processes, such as alliances, which maintain momentum. For example, women's, but not men's, tenure was predicted by publications, university service, departmental committee work, and length of service, but men's tenure could not be predicted except by length of service (McElrath 1992).

5. Conclusion

The issues traversed in this commentary go substantially beyond James Everett's purpose, but they indicate the next stages in research in an area where little progress has been made. For example, it would be useful to understand the model by which female academics advance. James Everett has taken a model for men and mapped in onto women to show discrepancy on merit. What are the factors that influence the success of those women who become academics and who progress in rank, including to senior levels? If we find, as with other "exceptional" Australian women, that they are likely not to have a spouse or children (Tharenou et al. 1994), then we need to develop different models of academic advancement for women compared to men. We also need to conduct longitudinal research to determine the impact of processes on advancement important in academics' career paths, those of initial work assignments and loads, use of networks and sponsoring, and publications. Most importantly, we need to test theoretical models describing why academic women advance less than comparable men. There appears to be an interplay between a number of factors, and tests of theoretical propositions that include the "context" and interactions between individual and situational factors in a dynamic manner are required. James Everett's analysis clearly shows that female academics in Australia have lower rank than comparable men. It is up to future research to test explanations of why, and to establish the contextual factors important to advancement.

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